

The Massachusetts Smallpox Preparedness Program

What is the Massachusetts Smallpox Preparedness Program?

The Smallpox Preparedness Program is the Massachusetts Department of Public Health's (MDPH) initiative to develop the ability to detect, treat and prevent smallpox. The Smallpox Preparedness Program is part of MDPH's broader emergency preparedness efforts, intended to maximize the public health system's defenses against possible bioterrorist acts.

Why is a Smallpox Preparedness Program Necessary?

Smallpox was a serious disease that killed 30-50% of people who became infected. An unprecedented global public health effort resulted in the eradication of smallpox in the 1970's. Following eradication, smallpox vaccination was discontinued and stockpiles of the smallpox virus were destroyed. The only known remaining samples of smallpox virus exist in laboratories in the US and Russia. There are concerns, however, that there are stockpiles of the virus in the hands of organizations, states, or terrorists, that could potentially be used as a biological weapon. While the likelihood of an intentional release of smallpox is small, the reintroduction of smallpox into an unprotected population could be devastating. The Massachusetts Smallpox Preparedness Program will maximize the Commonwealth's ability to respond quickly should a smallpox outbreak occur, minimizing the impact on our society.

What Are the Key Elements of the Smallpox Preparedness Program?

Enhanced Surveillance

Early identification and immediate reporting of suspected smallpox cases are key to containing the spread of the disease. If a case or outbreak

were to occur, increased surveillance for febrile rash illness would be critical to containing smallpox. The MDPH is working with healthcare providers and laboratories to ensure the rapid detection and containment of a smallpox outbreak.

Education and Training

A smallpox outbreak would require isolation of confirmed and suspected smallpox cases coupled with identification, vaccination, and close surveillance of their contacts. Healthcare workers and first responders are being educated and trained on procedures to ensure rapid containment of smallpox and treatment of patients should an outbreak occur.

Hospital Surge Capacity

Should a smallpox outbreak occur, hospitals might become quickly overwhelmed. Planning is underway to ensure that isolation and care of smallpox patients can occur with minimal exposure of unvaccinated personnel and patients to the disease. Massachusetts has divided the state into six regions to promote collaboration and planning for a large influx of patients among all hospitals in each region.

Pre-Event Vaccination Program

MDPH is coordinating the vaccination of volunteer healthcare workers, public health workers, and first responders. Vaccinated volunteers will serve on the Commonwealth's public health and healthcare smallpox teams. These teams would be mobilized in the event of a smallpox emergency so that unvaccinated workers would not be exposed to smallpox. "Pre-event" refers to the fact that these volunteer teams will be vaccinated now - before any smallpox event occurs. Additional details about the pre-event vaccination program are presented on the reverse page.

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Smallpox Vaccine Administration Training and Certification

Health care professionals receive training on smallpox vaccine administration, screening, infection control, site care and follow-up, and detection and treatment of adverse events. The training includes a practice session using bifurcated needles.

Health care professionals who complete the training receive a certificate of completion, CEU or CME credit and are included in our database so that they can be called upon should the need for a smallpox vaccine clinic ever arise.

Smallpox Vaccination

Health care professionals in both public health and acute care settings who volunteer to receive pre-event smallpox vaccination are carefully screened for conditions that increase their risk for adverse events. Once vaccinated, the volunteers are seen 6-8 days post-vaccination to evaluate their take to ensure the vaccination was successful. They also are given a 24-hour number to call should they, their contacts or their health care provider have questions or concerns regarding the smallpox vaccination.

Information about Pre-Event Smallpox Vaccination

For more information, please call the Massachusetts Department of Public Health at 617-983-6800, or visit the MDPH website at <http://www.mass.gov/dph> or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at <http://www.cdc.gov/smallpox>.